

REMARKS

The Examiner's indication of allowable subject matter of claims 23-24 is noted with appreciation.

Counsel also thanks Examiner Tran for the courtesy of telephone calls made December 19, 2003 and March 30, 2004.

During the December 19, 2003 telephone call, Examiner Tran suggested to incorporate claims 9 and 22 into independent claims 1 and 21, respectively. Applicants did not agree. By the Office Action dated December 30, 2003, Examiner Tran rejected all pending claims, except claims 23-24. During the March 30, 2004 telephone call, Examiner Tran confirmed that claims 9 and 22 are indeed rejected. Examiner Tran further suggested that Applicants incorporate claims 9 and 22 into independent claims 1 and 21, respectively, and argue their patentability. This Amendment follows accordingly.

Claims 9 and 27 have been cancelled. Claims 1 and 21 have been amended to respectively include claims 9 and 27 (which includes the limitations of claim 22 and depends from claim 21). Allowable claims 23-24 have been rewritten in independent form including all limitations of claims 1 and 21, respectively. Claims 2 and 5 have been amended to improve claim language. No new matter has been introduced through the foregoing amendments.

The 35 U.S.C. 112, *second paragraph* rejection of claims 2 and 5 are believed overcome in view of the above amendments.

The art rejections are traversed for the reasons advanced in the previous Amendment papers, notwithstanding the Examiner's arguments in pages 6-9 of the Office Action.

In addition, Applicants respectfully submit that the applied references fail to disclose, teach or suggest the Markush group limitation recited in claim 9 (now amended independent claim 1).

The applied references also fail to disclose, teach or suggest the Markush group limitation recited in claim 22. Note that the Markush group limitation recited in claim 22 is *narrower* than Markush group limitation recited in amended claim 1, by omitting --poly(meth)acrylamide--. The applied references, especially *Kobayashi*, do not disclose, teach or suggest any element of the Markush group recited in claim 22.

The applied references also fail to disclose, teach or suggest the Markush group limitation recited in claim 27 (now amended independent claim 21) which is identical to the Markush group limitation recited in claim 22.

Claims 23 and 24 should be allowed as indicated in page 9 of the Office Action.

The remaining claims should be considered allowable at least by virtue of their dependency.

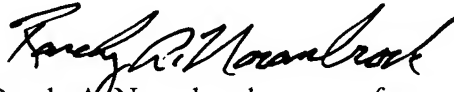
Each of the Examiner's rejections has been traversed/overcome. Accordingly, Applicants respectfully submit that all claims are now in condition for allowance. Early and favorable indication of allowance is courteously solicited.

The Examiner is invited to telephone the undersigned, Applicant's attorney of record, to facilitate advancement of the present application.

To the extent necessary, a petition for an extension of time under 37 C.F.R. 1.136 is hereby made. Please charge any shortage in fees due in connection with the filing of this paper, including extension of time fees, to Deposit Account 07-1337 and please credit any excess fees to such deposit account.

Respectfully submitted,

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